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## EFFICIENCY VS. THE INDIVIDUAL.

BY LEONARD M. PASSANO.

### I.

One of my colleagues, in a recent letter to *The Nation*, caustically deplores the prevailing practice of "The Czar," of college presidents, and "even of the deans"—I am quoting his words—their practice of discussing, in public and in print, the sins and shortcomings of the teacher. He says that, just as the inefficiency of the saleswoman in a department store is discussed by the management in its office and in private, so the faults and failures of the teacher should be talked about, *sub rosa*, in the presidential office or in the sanctum of the Carnegie Foundation.

I do not agree with my colleague. The inefficiency of the saleswoman concerns, primarily, her employer and herself, and only secondarily the customer and the public. The efficiency or inefficiency of the teacher concerns primarily the customer, the pupil, and the public. The teacher owes his duty first to the cause of education; secondly, to the people; thirdly, to the pupil; and fourthly, to his school. The whole duty of the educational management also, whether college president or school superintendent, consists of these same four items. Moreover, the management and the teacher owe mutual duty to each other as constituents of the educational democracy.

Such being the case the teacher, as also the management, is a subject of public interest, a subject for public discussion; and my colleague's error is simply another instance of the many fallacies arising when one attempts to apply, as he says, "the lesson of business administration" to "academic offices."

However that may be the teacher is now, always has been, and, probably, ever shall be publicly discussed. In the seventeenth century the author of "The Anatomy of Melancholy," quoting from Virgil and Horace, pictures the scholar and teacher in his prime as attended familiarly by

“Grief, labour, care, pale sickness, miseries,  
Fear, filthy poverty, hunger that cries,  
Terrible monsters to be seen with eyes.”

And in his decay:

“At last thy snow-white age in suburb schools,  
Shall toil in teaching boys their grammar rules.”

If Democritus Junior, if Horace and Virgil have said that the teacher is undervalued and underpaid, it is not seemly for us to deny it. Nor is there any disposition in current discussions to deny these facts. They are universally acknowledged, generally bemoaned, and for the most part treated as unalterable laws of nature. Nor do I consider them the most important items in this discussion. Of far more importance are the accusations of inefficiency and futility brought against the teacher and his methods; of importance, not because of the element of truth which is in the criticism—for it is not more true of education than of any other human activity—but because of its reiteration by men who are ignorant of the real aim of education, or who wilfully misconstrue that aim for their own ends.

It seems to the present speaker that there are three paramount influences leading to this criticism:

- 1°. Over-organization of the educational system;
- 2°. The demand from the “practical” man for a “product” which the true educator refuses to “produce”;
- 3°. The abnormal growth of “efficiency” management in the industrial world.

These three influences are not mutually exclusive, but it is convenient to treat them separately.

## II.

Over-organization would seem to be inseparable from the modern social system. That question we need not discuss. But the narrower question of its inseparability from the present educational system need not be answered unreservedly in the affirmative. Over-organization would seem to be largely a result of overgrowth, and overgrowth would appear to be preventable. It is avoidable at least in the technical school and the

college. Whether it can be avoided in the public school system seems a more debatable thesis. Accepting such organization, however, as inevitable, it does not follow that the faults of over-organization cannot be corrected.

First among these faults is the belief that organization can replace the individual; that the teacher, trained according to some perfect system and made a unit in some perfect school organization, will go on performing his functions perfectly, like a piece of automatic machinery, indefinitely; or at least until he is worn out and can be scrap-heaped.

Of course the parts of the machine must be lubricated, and at times readjusted. So the engineer goes travelling from Dan to Beersheba and back to Dan again seeking new lubricants.—We may, perhaps, pause long enough to say that lubricants are not funds or endowments.—He goes journeying about, when he might better remember that the parts of his machine are men and women working upon a thing of infinite variety, the young or adolescent human animal; and that oftentimes he would be better employed at home in trying to know and to help the individuals of whose company he is one.

If he did so he might doubtless be called "inefficient," and his doings would be no longer widely chronicled in the journals which help to spread the disease of our age, mechanistic megalomania. Perhaps, however, he would be recompensed by the more permanent chronicles of fifty or a hundred years hence. But the organization demands that he go to the Atlantic coast to learn that we are squandering  $x$  dollars per student-hour on algebra or Latin, and to the Pacific to learn that the teacher's useful work per week equals  $N$  multiplied by  $H$ . Thus the traveller brings home these "many inventions," and finds others awaiting him there.

I should be the last to discourage a change to improvement, but with Bacon I believe, "It were good therefore, that men in their innovations, would follow the example of Time itself; which indeed innovateth greatly, but quietly, and by degrees, scarce to be perceived. . . . And well to beware that it be the reformation that draweth on the change and not the desire of change that pretendeth the reformation."

Now change is desirable if change be normal and healthy

growth, and such normal and healthy growth the "good" individual teacher attains. But with him it is *growth*, slow but natural. Too often the organization change is a piece of skillful surgery. A leg is cut off and in its place two arms are made to grow; or a leg and an arm are cut into bits and remolded into a limb. Some wonderful freaks are produced, but like other abnormalities they fail to propagate their kind. Their number certainly serves to measure the activity of the educational management, and might indeed be used to measure its efficiency by adopting some such definition as the following: efficiency of management equals the number of new ideas learned divided by the number of new ideas adopted.

This propensity to consider new ideas (or old ones revised) made into a system, and worked by an organization, as a self-sufficient automatism in human activity, is not confined to educational matters nor is it entirely novel. Two centuries and a half ago William Penn said what will, with the alteration of a word or two, fit our present case:

"Educational organizations,"—he said governments—"like clocks, go from the motion men give them; . . . Wherefore [organizations] rather depend upon men, than men upon [organizations]. Let [teachers] be good, and the [educational organization] cannot be bad . . . but if [teachers] be bad, let the [organization] be never so good, they will . . . warp and spoil it."

One does not deny that the teacher to-day is better trained and better fitted for his work than he was fifty years ago or twenty-five years ago. It would be strange if he and his methods did not improve. He is accused, indeed, of being reactionary, of resisting all innovation. On the contrary, he is eager for improvement, and he keeps pace with his age. But he knows the past as well as the present, and knows that upon both the future must depend.

The "efficient" teacher of the educational organization has no concern with present, past or future time in education, except to condemn the past, to monopolize the present, and to hypothesize the future. His are the eternal laws of psychology and of pedagogics; given which, he knows exactly what to do with a class of a dozen or two-score "mental states" or "objects of

consciousness"—or by whatever name he calls the college freshman or the grammar school child. The "good" teacher has his psychology, too; but he calls it, or mixes it with, common sense. He faces a new class of a score of human beings knowing that in all probability it will be much like the last, but knowing also that it will have its differences; and he trusts to his own knowledge of human nature for adjustment to this new group of personalities, to his own individuality for the comprehension of theirs.

There is no reason why a teacher should not be both "good" and "efficient," for not even over-organization can completely obliterate individuality; but there are far too many who, being technically efficient, are individually unfit. They are an efficient part of the school mechanism, but to the child and to the child's parents, who after all are the people, they are a thing, a "brain . . . as dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage."

The "man on the street," recognizing that something is at fault but being taught to believe in organization—being himself, most probably, a unit of one—the man on the street, wishing to place the blame somewhere, calls the teacher inefficient—he knows that word by heart—and methods of teaching futile. But he knows, at least those running his schools for him know and tell him, that the technically efficient, the mechanically trained teacher is far cheaper, because far commoner, than the able individual teacher; and he would rather keep his tax rate low and grumble, than pay for education what it is worth and have no cause for complaint. He knows also, and wonders that it is so, that there are some teachers whose personality, whose character, fits them eminently for their profession, and he hopes that *his* children will fall to the lot of one of these.

### III.

The second item named as a cause of the criticism of the teacher and his methods is the demand from the practical man, the man who runs a shop or a factory, for a child or a man who can do *his* work, and do it without further training; the demand that useful subjects be taught.

I for one believe, as I have already said, that the educator's first duty is to the cause of education; and this for the reason

that upon education depends the future of mankind. And with duty to his profession goes duty to the man and to the child. The teacher should, therefore, always bear in mind that it is the thinking human being whom he is training, not merely for his life's *work*, but for his life's entire activity. The practical man ignores this fact, or is indifferent to it. What he wants is an operative for his factory, a hand for his shop, a clerk for his office. That the clerk or the hand has a life outside of the factory or office he knows, of course, but to him it is of no moment. Nor does he seem to believe that education should in any way concern itself with this broader life of the family and of society.

This will be denied by many, and, doubtless, truthfully by some; but that it is the point of view of those who, as practical men, criticize the teacher and the educational system, we cannot doubt when we read such jeremiads as the following:

"We are still teaching our children to read fairy tales instead of watching moving pictures";—the writer says, but does not mean, that we teachers should be watching moving pictures instead of teaching our children to read fairy tales—"we teach them to write instead of training them on typewriters; we painfully drill into them multiplication tables instead of initiating them into the mysteries of the slide rule; we teach them to add and subtract instead of drilling them on comptometers; we teach them to draw instead of carefully training them to use photography; we have them drum for years on the piano even if they have no musical ability, when they ought to be trained to put a soul into mechanical records."

A child with "no musical ability" is to "put a soul" into the graphophone! I defy any Bradley Headstone or Miss Peecher of the old order to produce such a being as this system of training would produce.

Doubtless every child should be trained specifically for some trade or profession, but it does not follow that the school should give this training at the sacrifice of other more important things. If the school can educate the child for the broad and general activities of society; if it can help to form his character aright; if it can discipline him to obedience, trustworthiness, industry, accuracy; it will be doing all that can be demanded of the

school. The child's further training for some particular trade should be provided for, and paid for, by those demanding such training; or else it should be made possible for the child to obtain such training at the expense of the state, after he has received his general education.

The practical man will not consent to this, and as a resulting compromise we have, on the one hand, vocational schools which too often sacrifice essential general knowledge; and on the other hand, the introduction into the ordinary grammar and high school of what might be called frittering studies; "useful" studies of no disciplinary value in themselves, and positively harmful in the habit of mental laxity which they are permitted to encourage.

#### IV.

There are times in the history of a language when the people discover, or re-discover, a word: equality, evolution, organism, eugenics—the list might be made long, but we are concerned here only with the latest discovery, efficiency. Having discovered the word they proceed first to use, then to abuse, and finally to forget it. Efficiency seems to have reached the second stage. Now efficiency is a real thing and a thing to be desired; a thing to be sought with travail. But let us first know that which we seek. It can, presumably, be exactly defined; and if it is to be used as a basis of comparison between men, as it has long been between machines, it should be capable of measurement.

We will glance at one or two definitions of efficiency, offered by very practical engineers in the course of articles written for the guidance of the teacher.

One writer says efficiency is "the relation"—the context shows that he means ratio—"between what is and what could be." Presumably we must divide the actual teacher's "what is," by the ideal teacher's "what could be." As this writer in another place says that "what is" is probably wrong, and as we are not told how to obtain the "what could be," our rule for determining a teacher's efficiency would seem to be: Divide something which is incorrect by something else we don't know.

Another definition given is "the quotient of output divided by input"; where "output," the dividend, consists of "money

or salable goods, health, recreation, education, satisfaction"; and input, the divisor, consists of "time, money or raw material, physical labor, mental labor, nervous energy, health, wear and tear of machinery."

The writer says that in many cases . . . neither the whole output nor the whole input are [*sic*] capable of accurate measurement in similar terms." Yet we are to divide one by the other. And he adds, that if we take this definition "so as to include in the input every conceivable kind of expenditure and in the output every conceivable kind of achievement, it will apply to every activity of man." Why not of gods and men?

He says that the efficiency thus got "cannot be stated in figures"—not figures of speech—"as a percentage," and proceeds forthwith, in two typical cases, to get efficiencies of zero and one hundred per cent. respectively.

A third writer gives as a measure of the educator's usefulness

$$N \times H$$

where  $N$  is "the number of students taking a course," and  $H$  is "the average number of hours a week devoted by each in reciting under active criticism." He says, "this of necessity ignores the quality of the product"; as if the management of a shoe factory should count the number of pairs of boots made by a workman regardless of how badly they were made.

This  $N \times H$  is "the numerator of a fraction expressing [the educator's] efficiency." The denominator is to be "estimated by fixing the maximum product of  $N$  and  $H$  possible with a reasonable expenditure of effort"!

Surely the teacher and the educational institution are justified in neglecting criticism and suggestions from such sources, unless they believe that they should

" welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand, but go!"

## V.

Thus we see that the three causes of criticism of the teacher and of education walk hand in hand, form but one tendency of the times. We organize and systematize because it is easier and cheaper so to do; easier and cheaper to obtain technically "efficient" teachers than to obtain able teachers of individuality and character. Besides, it is such good form to say that our organization is scientifically managed, like *any other business*, and to declare that our teachers are proved efficient by actual computation. The practical man will be helpless when confronted by such statements, and will accept whatever "product" the school sends him.

I agree with one writer on "Academic Efficiency"—it is the only thing in his article with which I do agree—when he says, "It is high time that something practical be done in the way of reform" of the whole educational system. He adds, that such reforms "do not come about by normal process of evolution," and that "we therefore must look for a millionaire philanthropist to begin the great educational experiment."

In the opinion of the present speaker we can do much more than he says, and in a much better way. Let us retain just so much of our organization as will be helpful to the individual teacher and necessary for administration. Let us try no "great educational experiment" either with or without a captured millionaire. Let us rather simply allow the educational system to grow a natural, unforced growth, after we have pruned off all superfluous graftings, and have trimmed off all excrescences due to the stings of insects. Let us remember that the business of the educator is to educate; not, to be efficient.

One of our critics names, amongst other "principles of efficiency," "supernal common sense." Let me suggest that educators begin their reformation, to use Bacon's term, by adopting this principle. The consequence will be that the attempt to apply methods of industrial management to education will be abandoned. The attempt to measure the efficiency of a teacher by finding the ratio of two things, or sets of things, neither of which can be measured, or by neglecting the very essence of education, will be abandoned. The attempt to satisfy the un-

reasonable demands of the practical man at his own pitiful price, will be abandoned. The sacrifice of the higher aims of education to material gain, will be abandoned.

There is a story that when Zola's remains were being transferred to the Panthéon, an anti-Semite fired a shot at Dreyfus, who was present. When tried, the defendant declared that he had no hatred for Dreyfus; had not even aimed at him. "My gesture was symbolic, and I fired the shot at an idea," he said.

The present speaker, also, is an idealist. He has no hatred for any efficient teacher or superintendent, and has not even aimed at any. He has simply fired his shot at an idea.

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